

Taylor Force's service and sacrifice is one that already is showing a change in policy in the interactions between our Nation and those in that region. Because as we think of values, the values of the Palestinian Authority is one that incites violence, that financially rewards terrorism, that treats terrorists like they are heads of state at their funerals and calls them martyrs.

I stand with Taylor Force. The House Foreign Affairs Committee stands with Taylor Force. This entire body, hopefully, when this comes to a vote, stands with the parents of Taylor Force, and our effective and better leveraging of our money because we should not provide \$1 of United States taxpayer funds if that money is going to go towards not only inciting violence, but also financially rewarding terrorism.

The United States taxpayers not only want to make sure that their money isn't going to financially reward Palestinian terrorists when they murder innocent Israelis, but this is also about Americans—U.S. tax dollars going to an entity that financially rewards terror.

I was moved greatly as I was listening to Chairman Emeritus ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN's remarks and the need to use all resources that are available to stand shoulder to shoulder with our Nation's greatest ally and change behavior of those bad actors. Those are the values, and we stand with Taylor Force.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, if there are no other speakers on this side, I am prepared to close. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, let me close by saying that this bipartisan legislation seeks to compel the Palestinian Authority to stop incentivizing acts of terrorism against innocent victims, including American Taylor Force.

Now, the encouragement of hooligans and thugs to just randomly try to kill people for no other reason than just to try to perpetrate violence needs to be stopped. While the Palestinian Authority seems to be encouraging knife attacks and terror attacks against Jewish Israelis, it is important to say that being in the wrong place at the wrong time leaves everybody vulnerable. That is what happened to Taylor Force. He wasn't Jewish. He happened to be American, and he happened to be a soldier in a war area and a very good, nice, decent human being. He didn't deserve it.

Nobody deserves to be a victim of terror. But certainly, the victims of terror, if we are going to cry out to help them, we have got to put a stop to this disgusting practice of calling these murderers martyrs. They are not martyrs. They are murderers. They have no regard for human beings. They have no regard for anything. It is time for us to say: Enough is enough.

In this current bill, it allows the United States to avoid any unintended consequences such as the cessation of humanitarian assistance, the right

thing to do. I hope that the Palestinian Authority will use this opportunity to stop these martyr payments, move away from incitement, and move toward a two-state solution. Again, this bipartisan legislation seeks to compel the Palestinian Authority to stop acts of terrorism, to stop aiding and abetting acts of terrorism against innocent victims, including American Taylor Force.

The gentleman from Florida (Mr. DEUTCH) said that if someone drives their car and hits somebody, nothing happens. But if someone drives their car and kills somebody, they get a martyr payment. There is something perverse about that. There is something just wrong about that. And it is something that the United States needs to put its foot down and say, once and for all: We will not tolerate violence.

Finally, let me say that this bill, aptly named as a tribute to Taylor Force, to his parents whom I had the pleasure of meeting, and to all of the people who knew him—he really was the driving force behind this legislation. Because when we heard what had happened, it was so abhorrent, it was so disgusting, that we felt we needed to get together and do something.

So I want to thank the Force family. I want to thank my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, especially Chairman ROYCE. This is something that every Member of Congress and both sides of the aisle should vote for.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1530

Mr. ROYCE of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, let me thank my friend and colleague, ELIOT ENGEL, for his eloquence in explaining the enormity of the tragedy here and the meaning of this terrorism. I think Mr. ENGEL has been such a diligent partner in not only helping us move this bill through, but helping us run the committee in a bipartisan way. I want to thank him at this moment as we pass this act for all of his work on this issue through the legislation and through the hearings. I think it has had an impact in the understanding of the Members here.

I also want to recognize and thank our former colleague, Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM. I have talked with him about this issue. He originated this bill in the Senate. I know also how passionately he feels about this, as do ELIOT and myself. I look forward to working with our Senate colleagues to ensure that the bill that we pass here in the House or the Senate bill, either one, the bottom line is that the Taylor Force Act must become law quickly. That is our objective.

The purpose of our aid, as we understand it, is to advance U.S. interests around the world. That is why we give aid. I think all of us can agree that

that does not include paying people to commit crimes of terrorism. The Palestinian Authority is flatout undermining U.S. interests by compensating and incentivizing violence, as articulated by my friend, Mr. ENGEL.

I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this bill, which ensures that there are consequences for this disgraceful policy and ensures that the U.S. plays no part, even indirectly, in participating in this behavior. The PA giving compensation for violence is beyond the pale. It is long past time that we treat it that way.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ROTHFUS). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. ROYCE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1164, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VENEZUELA HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DEFENSE OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE ACT OF 2017

Mr. ROYCE of California. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2658) to provide humanitarian assistance for the Venezuelan people, to defend democratic governance and combat widespread public corruption in Venezuela, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2658

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the "Venezuela Humanitarian Assistance and Defense of Democratic Governance Act of 2017".

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

- Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.
- Sec. 2. Findings.
- Sec. 3. Sense of Congress.
- Sec. 4. Requirement for strategy to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Venezuela.
- Sec. 5. Requirement for strategy to coordinate international humanitarian assistance.
- Sec. 6. Support for efforts at the United Nations on the humanitarian and political crisis in Venezuela.
- Sec. 7. Support for Organization of American States Inter-American Democratic Charter.
- Sec. 8. Concerns and report on the involvement of Venezuelan officials in corruption and illicit narcotics trafficking.
- Sec. 9. Sanctions on persons responsible for public corruption and undermining democratic governance in Venezuela.
- Sec. 10. Concerns over PDVSA transactions with Rosneft.

Sec. 11. Report on activities of certain governments in Venezuela.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress makes the following findings:

(1) The deterioration of democratic governance and the economic crisis in Venezuela have led to an unprecedented humanitarian situation in which people are suffering from severe shortages of essential medicines and basic food products.

(2) According to the World Health Organization, Venezuela had a shortage of necessary medications and medical supplies of—

- (A) 55 percent in 2014;
- (B) 67 percent in 2015; and
- (C) 75 percent in 2016.

(3) According to a Human Rights Watch 2016 report, it is increasingly difficult for many Venezuelans, particularly those in lower- or middle-income families, to obtain adequate nutrition and there are reports of symptoms of malnutrition, particularly in children.

(4) Maternal deaths in Venezuela increased by 66 percent from 2015 to 2016 while infant deaths increased by 30 percent.

(5) There were 240,000 confirmed malaria cases in Venezuela in 2016—a 76 percent increase over 2015.

(6) A survey—conducted jointly by the Central University of Venezuela, the Andrés Bello Catholic University, and the Simón Bolívar University—found that almost 75 percent of Venezuelans lost an average of at least 19 pounds in 2016 as a result of a lack of proper nutrition amidst the country's economic crisis.

(7) Despite massive shortages of basic foodstuffs and essential medicines, Nicolás Maduro has rejected repeated requests from the Venezuelan National Assembly and civil society organizations to bring humanitarian aid into the country.

(8) The International Monetary Fund has estimated that in Venezuela in 2016 the country's gross domestic product contracted by 12 percent and inflation rate reached 720 percent, and has stated that Venezuela had the worst growth and inflation performance in the world.

(9) The International Monetary Fund has not convened an Article IV Executive Board consultation for Venezuela since September 13, 2004, which greatly limits the extent of information available to the international community about the severity of the Venezuelan economic crisis.

(10) Venezuela's political, economic, and humanitarian crisis is fueling social tensions that are resulting in growing incidents of public unrest, looting, violence among citizens, and an exodus of Venezuelans abroad.

(11) These social distortions are taking place amidst an alarming climate of criminal violence. According to the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, Caracas, Venezuela had the highest per capita homicide rate of any capital city in the world in 2015 at 120 murders per 100,000 citizens.

(12) In 2016, 18,155 Venezuelans submitted asylum requests in the United States, which was the greatest number of requests by any nationality, according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

(13) International and domestic human rights groups, such as Foro Penal Venezolano, recognize more than 600 political prisoners in Venezuela, including opposition leader and former Chacao mayor Leopoldo López, Judge María Lourdes Afiuni, Caracas Mayor Antonio José Ledezma Díaz, National Assembly Deputy Gilber Caro, and former San Cristobal mayor Daniel Ceballos.

(14) According to media accounts, over 125 people lost their lives as the result of public demonstrations and protests in Venezuela since April 2017.

SEC. 3. SENSE OF CONGRESS.

It is the sense of Congress that—

(1) Nicolás Maduro should permit the delivery of international humanitarian assistance to address the widespread and deeply concerning shortages of essential medicines and basic food products faced by the people of Venezuela;

(2) it is in the best interest of the Venezuelan people for the Government of Venezuela to engage with multilateral institutions to ameliorate the effects of the country's ongoing economic, social, and humanitarian crisis;

(3) Nicolás Maduro should immediately release all political prisoners and respect internationally recognized human rights in order to facilitate the conditions for political negotiations and dialogue in Venezuela;

(4) Nicolás Maduro and the Supreme Tribunal of Justice of Venezuela should take steps to reinstate the full powers and authorities of the National Assembly of Venezuela in accordance with the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela;

(5) Venezuela's National Electoral Council should establish a specific timeline to hold national, regional, and municipal elections in accordance with the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and allow supervision of credible international electoral observers; and

(6) the United States should support meaningful efforts towards a substantive dialogue through which all parties uphold their commitments and agree to specific deadlines to restore respect for Venezuela's constitutional mechanisms and resolve the country's political, economic, and humanitarian crisis.

SEC. 4. REQUIREMENT FOR STRATEGY TO PROVIDE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE PEOPLE OF VENEZUELA.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State, in coordination with the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, shall submit to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate, the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate a strategy to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Venezuela through credible and independent nongovernmental organizations operating in Venezuela or in neighboring countries to alleviate the suffering of the Venezuelan people.

(b) MATTERS TO BE INCLUDED.—The strategy required under subsection (a) shall include the following:

(1) A description of how and to what extent the following assistance will be provided:

(A) Public health commodities for Venezuelan health facilities and services, including medicines on the World Health Organization's List of Essential Medicines and basic medical supplies and equipment.

(B) Basic food commodities and nutritional supplements needed to address growing malnutrition and improve food security for the people of Venezuela, with a specific emphasis on the most vulnerable populations.

(C) Technical assistance to ensure health and food commodities are appropriately selected, procured, and distributed, predominantly through local nongovernmental organizations.

(2) An identification of United States Agency for International Development best practices in delivering humanitarian assistance and how such best practices are being utilized in providing humanitarian assistance to Venezuela.

SEC. 5. REQUIREMENT FOR STRATEGY TO COORDINATE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE.

(a) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Congress that the appropriate United Nations humanitarian agencies should conduct and publish an independent assessment on—

- (1) the extent and impact of the shortages of food and medicine in Venezuela; and
- (2) the efforts needed to resolve such shortages.

(b) STRATEGY.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, shall submit a multi-year strategy to the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate and the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives that—

(1) describes how the United States will secure support from international donors, including regional partners in Latin America and the Caribbean, for the provision of humanitarian assistance to the people of Venezuela; and

(2) identifies governments that are willing to provide financial and technical assistance for the provision of such humanitarian assistance to the people of Venezuela and a description of such assistance.

SEC. 6. SUPPORT FOR EFFORTS AT THE UNITED NATIONS ON THE HUMANITARIAN AND POLITICAL CRISIS IN VENEZUELA.

(a) INITIAL EFFORTS.—The President shall instruct the Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations to use the voice and vote of the United States to secure the necessary votes—

(1) to place the humanitarian and political crisis in Venezuela on the agenda at the United Nations; and

(2) to secure a Presidential Statement from the United Nations urging the Government of Venezuela to allow the delivery of humanitarian relief and to lift bureaucratic impediments or any other obstacles so that independent nongovernmental organizations can provide the proper assistance to the people of Venezuela without any interference by such government.

(b) ADDITIONAL EFFORTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—If the Government of Venezuela refuses to allow the delivery of humanitarian relief and lift bureaucratic impediments and any other obstacles described in subsection (a)(2), then beginning not later than 30 days after the conclusion of the efforts of the United Nations described in such subsection, the President shall instruct the Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations to use the voice and vote of the United States to secure the adoption of a resolution described in paragraph (2).

(2) RESOLUTION DESCRIBED.—The resolution of the United Nations described in paragraph (1) is a resolution—

(A) directing the Government of Venezuela to promptly allow safe and unhindered access for humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners, including possible support from neighboring countries; and

(B) calling on the Government of Venezuela to—

- (i) allow the delivery of food and medicine;
- (ii) end human rights violations;
- (iii) agree to free, fair and transparent elections with credible international observers;
- (iv) cease violence; and
- (v) release all political prisoners.

SEC. 7. SUPPORT FOR ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES INTER-AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC CHARTER.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following findings:

(1) Article 1 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, adopted by the Organization of American States in Lima on September 11, 2001, affirms, “The peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it.”.

(2) Article 19 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter states “an unconstitutional interruption of the democratic order or an unconstitutional alteration of the constitutional regime that seriously impairs the democratic order in a member state, constitutes, while it persists, an insurmountable obstacle to its government’s participation in sessions of the General Assembly . . . and other bodies of the Organization.”.

(3) Article 20 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter provides—

(A) “In the event of an unconstitutional alteration of the constitutional regime that seriously impairs the democratic order in a member state, any member state or the Secretary General may request the immediate convocation of the Permanent Council to undertake a collective assessment of the situation and to take such decisions as it deems appropriate.”; and

(B) “The Permanent Council, depending on the situation, may undertake the necessary diplomatic initiatives, including good offices, to foster the restoration of democracy.”.

(b) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Congress that—

(1) Nicolás Maduro, the National Electoral Council of Venezuela, and the Supreme Tribunal of Justice of Venezuela have carried out systematic efforts to undermine, block, and circumvent the authorities and responsibilities of the Venezuelan National Assembly as mandated in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela;

(2) such efforts by Nicolás Maduro and the Supreme Tribunal of Justice of Venezuela amount to an unconstitutional alternation of the constitutional regime that seriously impairs the democratic order in Venezuela; and

(3) the Secretary of State, working through the United States Permanent Mission to the Organization of American States, should take additional steps to support ongoing efforts by the Secretary General of the Organization of American States—

(A) to invoke the Inter-American Democratic Charter;

(B) to advance a collective assessment of the situation in Venezuela; and

(C) to promote diplomatic initiatives to foster the restoration of Venezuelan democracy.

SEC. 8. CONCERNS AND REPORT ON THE INVOLVEMENT OF VENEZUELAN OFFICIALS IN CORRUPTION AND ILLICIT NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following findings:

(1) The deterioration of governance in Venezuela has been exacerbated by the involvement of senior officials of the Government of Venezuela, including members of the National Electoral Council, the judicial system, and the Venezuelan security forces, in acts of corruption and illicit narcotics trafficking and related money laundering.

(2) In March 2015, the Department of the Treasury’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network determined that approximately \$2,000,000,000 had been siphoned from Venezuela’s public oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela S.A., in conjunction with its designation of the Banca Privada d’Andorra as a Foreign Financial Institution of Primary Money Laundering Concern.

(3) On August 1, 2016, General Nestor Reverol, Venezuela’s current Minister of Interior and former National Guard com-

mander, was indicted in a United States district court for participating in an international cocaine trafficking conspiracy.

(4) On November 18, 2016, Franqui Francisco Flores de Freitas and Efraín Antonio Campo Flores, nephews of Nicolás Maduro and Venezuelan First Lady Cilia Flores, were convicted in a United States district court on charges of conspiring to import cocaine into the United States.

(5) On February 13, 2017, the Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control designated Tareck Zaidan El Aissami Maddah for his involvement in illicit narcotics trafficking, pursuant to the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act (21 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.; title VIII of Public Law 106-120).

(6) The Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control has designated additional individuals and senior Venezuelan officials for their involvement in illicit narcotics trafficking, pursuant to such Act, including—

(A) Venezuelan national Samark Jose Lopez Bello, who is the primary front man and money launderer for Tareck Zaidan El Aissami Maddah;

(B) Hugo Armando Carvajal Barrios, who is the current National Assembly Deputy and the former Director of Venezuela’s Military Intelligence Directorate;

(C) Henry de Jesus Rangel Silva, who is the current Governor of Trujillo State and the former Director of Venezuela’s Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Services;

(D) Ramon Emilio Rodriguez Chacin, who previously served as the Minister of Interior; and

(E) Freddy Alirio Bernal Rosales, who previously served as the Mayor of the Libertador municipality of Caracas.

(7) On September 12, 2017, Ambassador William Brownfield testified before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control that drug trafficking organizations in Venezuela have “completely penetrated virtually every security, law enforcement, and justice-related institution” and that “there will be no long-term, democratic, prosperous and secure solution in Venezuela until there is a solution to the drug trafficking organization presence”.

(b) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) CORRUPTION.—The term “corruption” means the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including by bribery, nepotism, fraud, or embezzlement.

(2) GRAND CORRUPTION.—The term “grand corruption” means corruption committed at a high level of government that—

(A) distorts policies or the central functioning of the country; and

(B) enables leaders to benefit at the expense of the public good.

(c) REPORTING REQUIREMENT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State, acting through the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and in consultation with the intelligence community (as defined in section 3(4) of the National Security Act of 1947 (50 U.S.C. 3003(4))), shall submit a report to Congress that describes the involvement of senior officials of the Government of Venezuela, including members of the National Electoral Council, the judicial system, and the Venezuelan security forces, in acts of corruption in Venezuela, with a specific emphasis on acts of grand corruption.

(2) ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS.—The report submitted under paragraph (1) shall—

(A) describe how the acts of corruption described in the report pose direct challenges for United States national security and international security;

(B) identify individuals that frustrate the ability of the United States to combat illicit narcotics trafficking; and

(C) include input from the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Office of Foreign Assets Control, and the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network.

(3) FORM.—The report under paragraph (1) shall be submitted in unclassified form, but may include a classified annex. The unclassified portion of the report shall be made available to the public.

SEC. 9. SANCTIONS ON PERSONS RESPONSIBLE FOR PUBLIC CORRUPTION AND UNDERMINING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN VENEZUELA.

(a) FINDING.—Executive Order 13692 (50 U.S.C. 1701 note), which was signed on March 8, 2015, established sanctions against individuals responsible for undermining democratic processes and institutions and involved in acts of public corruption that were not included in the Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-278).

(b) SANCTIONS.—Section 5 of the Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-278) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—

(A) in paragraph (2), by striking “or” at the end;

(B) by redesignating paragraph (3) as paragraph (5);

(C) by inserting after paragraph (2) the following:

“(3) is responsible for, or complicit in, ordering, controlling, or otherwise directing, significant actions or policies that undermine democratic processes or institutions;

“(4) is a government official, or a senior associate of such an official, that is responsible for, or complicit in, ordering, controlling, or otherwise directing, acts of significant corruption, including the expropriation of private or public assets for personal gain, corruption related to government contracts or the extraction of natural resources, bribery, or the facilitation or transfer of the proceeds of corruption to foreign jurisdictions; or”;

(D) in paragraph (5) (as redesignated), by striking “paragraph (1) or (2)” and inserting “paragraph (1), (2), (3), or (4)”; and

(2) in subsection (e), by striking “December 31, 2019” and inserting “December 31, 2022”.

(c) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Congress that the President and Secretary of State should seek to encourage partner countries of the Organization of American States, the European Union, and the United Nations to impose sanctions with respect to Venezuelan individuals that are similar to sanctions imposed by the United States with respect to such Venezuelan individuals.

SEC. 10. CONCERNS OVER PDVSA TRANSACTIONS WITH ROSNEFT.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following findings:

(1) In late 2016, Venezuelan state-owned oil company Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (referred to in this section as “PDVSA”), through a no-compete transaction, secured a loan from Russian government-controlled oil company Rosneft, using 49.9 percent of PDVSA’s American subsidiary, CITGO Petroleum Corporation, including its assets in the United States, as collateral. As a result of this transaction, 100 percent of CITGO is held as collateral by PDVSA’s creditors.

(2) CITGO, a wholly owned subsidiary of PDVSA, is engaged in interstate commerce and owns and controls critical energy infrastructure in 19 States in the United States, including an extensive network of pipelines, 48 terminals, and 3 refineries, with a combined oil refining capacity of 749,000 barrels per day. CITGO’s refinery in Lake Charles,

Louisiana is the sixth largest refinery in the United States.

(3) The Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on Rosneft, which is controlled by the Russian Government, and its Executive Chairman, Igor Sechin, following Russia's military invasion of Ukraine and its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014.

(4) The Department of Homeland Security has designated the energy sector as critical to United States infrastructure.

(5) The growing economic crisis in Venezuela raises the probability that the Government of Venezuela and PDVSA will default on their international debt obligations, resulting in a scenario in which Rosneft could come into control of CITGO's United States energy infrastructure holdings.

(b) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Congress that—

(1) control of critical United States energy infrastructure by Rosneft, a Russian government-controlled entity currently under United States sanctions, would pose a significant risk to United States national security and energy security;

(2) the President should take all necessary steps to prevent Rosneft from gaining control of critical United States interstate energy infrastructure;

(3) a default by PDVSA on its loan from Rosneft, resulting in Rosneft coming into possession of PDVSA's United States CITGO assets, would warrant careful consideration by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States;

(4) if PDVSA defaults on its debt obligations, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control should review CITGO's transactions with United States persons to assess and ensure compliance with United States sanctions policies and regulations; and

(5) the Department of Homeland Security should conduct an assessment of the security risks posed by foreign control of CITGO's United States energy infrastructure holdings and keep the relevant committees of Congress fully informed of its findings and any subsequent strategy to address vulnerabilities to United States energy security as a result.

SEC. 11. REPORT ON ACTIVITIES OF CERTAIN GOVERNMENTS IN VENEZUELA.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State, acting through the Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the Department of State and in consultation with the intelligence community, shall submit to Congress a report that describes the full extent of cooperation by the Governments of the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, Cuba, and Iran with the Government of Venezuela and the Venezuelan armed forces.

(b) FORM.—The report under subsection (a) shall be submitted in unclassified form, but may include a classified annex. The unclassified portion of the report shall be made available to the public.

(c) DEFINITION.—In this section, the term "intelligence community" has the meaning given such term in section 3(4) of the National Security Act of 1947 (50 U.S.C. 3003(4)).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. ROYCE) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ROYCE of California. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days

to revise and extend their remarks and to include any extraneous material.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. ROYCE of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, this bill represents broad bipartisan concern here in the House for the worsening humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. It calls on the Secretary of State and the USAID Administrator to develop a humanitarian assistance strategy to help the people of Venezuela.

As the authoritarian Venezuelan Government digs in its heels and consolidates its power, the people of that once wealthy nation, last year, experienced a 65 percent increase in maternal mortality, a 30 percent increase in infant mortality, and a 76 percent increase in malaria cases.

Severe shortages of basic medicine persists. They have right now about 5 percent of the basic medicines that they used to have. A 2016 report shows that three out of every four Venezuelans had lost an average of 19 pounds due to lack of proper nutrition and due to lack of food.

Despite all of this, President Maduro continues to deny the existence of a full-fledged humanitarian crisis while blaming any hardships on his opposition or the international community that seeks only to support the people of Venezuela in their pursuit of democracy and basic human rights.

I applaud the administration for sanctioning those in the Maduro regime complicit—complicit—in the rampant corruption and anti-democratic measures that have stifled the will of the people there. But we must address the specter of the complete collapse of the Venezuelan economy and the resulting humanitarian crisis.

I encourage my colleagues to support this measure by Mr. DESANTIS, which will require a strategy to address the crisis while signaling bipartisan support for the democratic and human rights aspirations of the people of Venezuela.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
Washington, DC, December 5, 2017.

Hon. EDWARD R. ROYCE,
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs,
Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN ROYCE: I write with respect to H.R. 2658, the "Venezuela Humanitarian Assistance and Democratic Governance." As a result of your having consulted with us on provisions within H.R. 2658 that fall within the Rule X jurisdiction of the Committee on the Judiciary, I forego any further consideration of this bill so that it may proceed expeditiously to the House floor for consideration.

The Judiciary Committee takes this action with our mutual understanding that by foregoing consideration of H.R. 2658 at this time, we do not waive any jurisdiction over subject matter contained in this or similar legislation and that our committee will be appro-

priately consulted and involved as this bill or similar legislation moves forward so that we may address any remaining issues in our jurisdiction. Our committee also reserves the right to seek appointment of an appropriate number of conferees to any House-Senate conference involving this or similar legislation and asks that you support any such request.

I would appreciate a response to this letter confirming this understanding with respect to H.R. 2658 and would ask that a copy of our exchange of letters on this matter be included in the Congressional Record during floor consideration of the bill.

Sincerely,

BOB GOODLATTE,
Chairman.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC, December 4, 2017.

Hon. BOB GOODLATTE,
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary,
Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN GOODLATTE: Thank you for consulting with the Foreign Affairs Committee and agreeing to be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 2658, the Venezuela Humanitarian Assistance and Defense of Democratic Governance Act of 2017, so that the bill may proceed expeditiously to the House floor.

I agree that your forgoing further action on this measure does not in any way diminish or alter the jurisdiction of your committee, or prejudice its jurisdictional prerogatives on this bill or similar legislation in the future. I would support your effort to seek appointment of an appropriate number of conferees from your committee to any House-Senate conference on this legislation.

I will seek to place our letters on H.R. 2658 into the Congressional Record during floor consideration of the bill. I appreciate your cooperation regarding this legislation and look forward to continuing to work together as this measure moves through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

EDWARD R. ROYCE,
Chairman.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume, and I rise in support of this measure.

Mr. Speaker, I authored this bill, the Venezuela Humanitarian Assistance and Defense of Democratic Governance Act, in the House with our chair emeritus of the Foreign Affairs Committee, ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN. I want to say that there is no Member of this body who has done more to champion democracy and human rights in Venezuela than the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN).

I also want to thank her longtime staff director, Eddy Acevedo, who is in his last week on Capitol Hill. Eddy has been such a positive force on Venezuela and the entire Latin American region in support of ILEANA's work. He has been a consistent collaborator with my staff, and his work here will be sorely missed.

I also want to say that I appreciate Chairman ROYCE's steadfast commitment to the Venezuelan people and his support for this legislation.

I also want to thank Senator CARDIN for authorizing this measure in the other body. I hope we will be able to work with the Senate, the other body, to get this bill on the President's desk.

Mr. Speaker, with its massive energy resources, Venezuela should be one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Unfortunately, irresponsible policies put in place by President Maduro and his predecessor, Hugo Chavez, brought the country to near economic collapse and created a dangerous humanitarian crisis.

The statistics tell a tragic story. Maternal deaths in the country increased by 66 percent from 2015 to 2016, while infant deaths increased by 30 percent. There were 240,000 confirmed malaria cases in Venezuela in 2016, which is a 76 percent increase over 2015.

A survey carried out by three reputable Venezuelan universities found that nearly three-quarters of Venezuelans lost an average of at least 19 pounds in 2016 as a result of lack of proper nutrition.

Despite massive shortages of food and medicine, President Maduro continues to reject efforts to bring humanitarian assistance into the country. Last summer, Mr. Maduro handed control of the country's food supply over to the Venezuelan military, and while many Venezuelans starve, some of the military brass are making money hand over fist by selling the country's scarce food supplies on the black market. That is like letting the fox into the chicken coop.

In short, President Maduro is running Venezuela into the ground. It is horrific for that country's people, and it is a concern for our own security as this country in our neighborhood becomes less and less stable. So I support targeted sanctions that hold corrupt and abusive Venezuelan officials accountable.

But that must be only a part of our policy. We also must be focused on getting food and medicine to those in most need in the country. This bill calls on the USAID and the State Department to develop a strategy to provide humanitarian assistance to Venezuela while at the same time instructing our Ambassador of the United Nations to work with partners at the U.N. Security Council and throughout the U.N. system to multilaterally address the country's crisis.

This is urgent business, Mr. Speaker. We need to put U.S. aid, the USAID, and the United Nations on a path toward providing much-needed humanitarian assistance to the Venezuelan people. We want to choke off the government. The government is a cancer on the Venezuelan people, but we don't want to hurt the Venezuelan people. That is what the legislation is all about. That is why I wrote it, that is why I authored it, and that is why we agree on a bipartisan basis.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join Congresswoman ROS-LEHTINEN and myself. It is important legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ROYCE of California. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Mr. ELIOT ENGEL for authoring this bill along with

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN. I also thank ALBIO SIRES and RON DESANTIS, the cosponsors of this measure.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN), who is the chairman emeritus of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the primary Republican cosponsor of this bill.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for the time, and I thank the ranking member for those very sweet words.

Mr. Speaker, I echo what Ranking Member ENGEL said about my trusted staff director, Eddy Acevedo. This is his last week with us. He starts Monday with the USAID. He has got the whole weekend to party on. He has been my partner in all of these battles in favor of freedom and democracy and against autocratic regimes, which brings us to this bill before us, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in strong support of this bill, H.R. 2658, the Venezuela Humanitarian Assistance and Defense of Democratic Governance Act of 2017. I am proud to be, as the chairman said, the Republican lead on this important legislation.

I have been proud to work side by side with the author of the bill, our ranking member on the Foreign Affairs Committee, Mr. ELIOT ENGEL, in putting this bill together. ELIOT has been a leading voice in this legislative body in support of freedom and democracy across the globe, as has our esteemed chairman. But ELIOT has really focused in on this hemisphere, especially on Venezuela. I want to thank him for his leadership on this issue.

I also want to thank his trusted adviser sitting two seats away from him on all Western Hemisphere-related items. Eric Jacobstein is my buddy from Haiti. We have enjoyed as much as one can enjoy going to an island nation that needs so much help. The people of Haiti are beautiful, and it has been a joy to travel with Eric and with Eddy. Throughout the years, Eric has worked closely with us and with our office. We work in a bipartisan manner. That is the tone that our esteemed chairman has set for the committee. Eric and ELIOT work that way as well. Their knowledge and expertise on this topic has been instrumental to our committee.

The bill before us, Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2658, is simple, it is straightforward, and it is important. Maduro, like Chavez before him—two thugs—has turned Venezuela from a once vibrant and thriving nation into a country on the brink of utter collapse. The results have been disastrous for the people of Venezuela. There is food shortage, there is water shortage, and there is a severe lack of medicine and medical supplies. There is a lack of goods and services everywhere you turn.

The people need to get proper nutrition. They need proper care, but they can't find it. It is a crisis that Maduro and his thugs have denied exists be-

cause he is eating very well. The other day he was making a televised public declaration. He opens up the drawer, takes an empanada, and he is stuffing his face. But the people are starving. But recognizing it would mean that Chavismo has utterly failed, so they refuse to recognize this.

So what happens?

The Venezuelan people suffer from severe malnutrition. They are subject to price controls. It is unbelievable the prices of items there. If they can ever get the food, if they can ever get the services they need, then the people can't afford them. They are subject to substandard and unhygienic conditions. This has led to a sharp rise in infant mortality, and really mortality rates across the board in Venezuela have gone up.

In short, the majority of the people in Venezuela are living in misery. What was once the breadbasket of the whole hemisphere, now the people don't have food. They are living in misery. The Maduro regime is not only to blame, but it is ensuring that the humanitarian situation gets even worse. It was Maduro who ordered the supreme court to block a law from the opposition that would have helped facilitate humanitarian aid from NGOs and other international entities. As a result, it is ever so difficult to get the supplies needed to respond to this crisis into Venezuela to the people who so desperately need it. That is why, Mr. Speaker, this bill is so important.

□ 1545

It directs USAID, the institution Eddy will be a partner of in just a few days, and our great Department of State to develop a plan in order to determine if and how the U.S. can possibly help with some of the humanitarian assistance through credible and independent NGOs, or nongovernmental organizations, that are operating in Venezuela or neighboring countries to ensure that this assistance does get to the people who desperately need it.

The bill also directs our Ambassador to the United Nations to use our full voice, full vote, and full influence of the United States to place the humanitarian and political crises in Venezuela on the agenda at the U.N.

Mr. Speaker, this body, alongside our friends in New York at the U.N., has worked to hold rogue regimes accountable for failing to allow humanitarian assistance in their countries. Whether it is Syria or Yemen, this body has spoken in a unified manner that humanitarian assistance should not be prevented from reaching the people.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUSTOFF of Tennessee). The time of the gentlewoman has expired.

Mr. ROYCE of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield the gentlewoman from Florida an additional 1 minute.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. But on Venezuela, Mr. Speaker, it seems as if we hold a different standard, and that is

unacceptable. For too long, Venezuela has been shielded from criticism and action at the U.N. by its cronies, like the equally corrupt and morally reprehensible Castro regime in Cuba.

This is precisely the kind of situation for which the U.N. was created to respond; yet, to date, the response has been woefully inadequate and shamefully void of substance.

We have got to lead on this effort, and this bill is what we need. There are millions of people suffering in Venezuela. We are in a situation to help.

I would point out to our chairman and the ranking member that we had some excellent news in the minutes that we have been speaking. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved the nomination of our former committee chief of staff, Yleem Poblete, for Assistant Secretary of State for Verification and Compliance. It now goes to the full Senate. I know that she will be with us on these measures that attack atrocious regimes and will help alleviate the humanitarian crisis.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SIREs), my good friend and a valued member of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the ranking member of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee.

Mr. SIREs. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2658, the Venezuela Humanitarian Assistance and Defense of Democratic Governance Act.

I thank Ranking Member ELIOT ENGEL and Chairman ROYCE for all their hard work and always being there for the people of Venezuela.

Of course, I want to thank the dynamic duo of Eddy Acevedo and ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN. Even though we are going miss Eddy, I am sure he will continue to fight in the defense of human rights wherever he is.

The situation in Venezuela continues to deteriorate. A country with the world's largest known oil reserves is spiraling into a collapsed state. We have people struggling just to survive. Journalists and citizens risk their lives every day to report what is happening inside Caracas and around the country.

We see that tensions are growing and government security forces shoot first and ask questions later. It is clear that the failed Chavismo policies and the authoritarian actions of Nicolas Maduro have brought all of this pain and suffering upon the Venezuelan people.

Maduro and his cronies continue to get rich as they traffic money and drugs while doing nothing to help the millions of suffering people. Multiple news reports confirm a growing health crisis as people lack access to basic medicines, and reports of infant mortality rates and preventable diseases such as malaria are on the rise.

To hold the Maduro regime accountable, both the Obama and Trump administrations have sanctioned senior officials in the Venezuelan Government

for their actions with narcotrafficking, money laundering, and other illicit activities.

There is consensus among the majority of the hemisphere—multilateral institutions such as the OAS, the United Nations, and the European Union—that Maduro is destroying democracy and violating human rights.

These sanctions are not against the Venezuelan people but are carefully crafted and targeted toward the individuals who are committed to destroying the lives of millions of innocent civilians in exchange for money and power.

That is why I am supporting this important and timely legislation that helps to address the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Venezuela and codifies President Obama's sanctions related to corrupt officials in the country. The United States needs to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Venezuelan people and be ready to assist them, while holding the corrupt regime officials accountable.

Once again, I thank my colleagues for all their hard work on this issue, and I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2658.

Before I yield back, I wish Eddy good luck. I thank him for all his hard work. He will be missed. I hate to see that dynamic duo split, but I am sure it will continue to work.

Mr. ROYCE of California. Mr. Speaker, Mr. SIREs is not alone.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. COOK), chairman of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere and a cosponsor of this bill.

Mr. COOK. Mr. Speaker, today, I rise in strong support of Mr. DESANTIS' resolution, H. Res. 259, and Mr. ENGEL's bill, H.R. 2658, which both speak to the ongoing political economic, social, and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela under the dictatorship of Nicolas Maduro.

Once the richest country in South America, Venezuela now has a total unpaid bond debt of over \$1 billion and is in default on multiple loans.

The Maduro regime is responsible for widespread human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, mass arbitrary detentions, and torture of the political opposition. They have detained five Citgo executives who are dual U.S.-Venezuelan citizens, as well as U.S. citizen and religious missionary Joshua Holt, who remains unjustly imprisoned.

American adversaries are among the main supporters of Venezuela. More than a dozen high-ranking Cuban officers as well as thousands of Cuban intelligence agents are reportedly in Venezuela.

Venezuela continues to receive financial support from Russia and China. Venezuela also possesses 5,000 Russian-made, man-portable surface-to-air missiles and is the largest operator of Russian arms and military hardware in Latin America.

The humanitarian crisis is not limited to Venezuela alone. The crisis in

Venezuela has led to mass immigration. Last year, the U.S. received 18,000 requests from Venezuelans seeking to escape the brutal regime. Waves of Venezuelan refugees have also fled to Chile, Argentina, Colombia, and Brazil, threatening to create a regionwide migration crisis.

The regime refuses to accept humanitarian aid from the international community, preferring instead to use its citizens as political pawns at the expense of their health and safety.

I commend the efforts of the Trump administration to take a principled stand to support the Venezuelan people and sanction the most dangerous actors in the Venezuelan Government. Just yesterday, the regime threatened that elections in Venezuela would only take place if these sanctions were lifted. I wholeheartedly reject this threat and remain committed to the sanctions and to continuing to put pressure on the Maduro regime.

I express my strong support for these two bills. The U.S. supports a free, democratic, and independent Venezuela that is accountable to the people. We stand ready to assist the Venezuelan people and provide humanitarian assistance, and we urge more action from our partners in the region and the international community to resolve the crisis in Venezuela.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ), my good friend and a member of the Appropriations Committee.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I, too, rise to commend my sister in so many fights, Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN, whom we will miss. But we are not letting her get away that quickly, because we have about a year together with many fights and fun to engage in.

I am here this afternoon to talk about something not very pleasant, and that is the absolute necessity to adopt H.R. 2658, the Venezuela Humanitarian Assistance and Defense of Democratic Governance Act of 2017.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN, Mr. ENGEL, and Mr. SIREs have introduced this legislation, rightfully, because the Maduro regime has repeatedly demonstrated that they have no respect for political freedom, human rights, or even the basic needs of their own citizens. The consequences for the Venezuelan people are becoming more and more devastating every day.

It is absolutely unconscionable that the Maduro regime is refusing to allow food, medicine, and other essential supplies to reach Venezuelans in need. This bill would be a valuable step to ensure that the Venezuelan people are helped, even if their government would prefer that people die rather than receive aid from the international community.

The sanctions that have been imposed thus far against the perpetrators

in the Maduro regime have been steps in the right direction, but we must do more. The Venezuelan Government has demonstrated time and time again that they won't do the right thing on their own, so we must continue to apply stronger and stronger pressure. This legislation would strengthen the President's ability to tighten the screws on Maduro and his cronies.

In order for Venezuela to return to peace and prosperity, its democracy must be restored and strengthened. Elections under the Maduro regime have been manipulated and undermined, and it is absolutely essential that next year's Presidential election proceeds freely and fairly.

That is why it is so urgent that we pass this bill into law to empower the State Department to work with our allies and partners and the Venezuelan people to help them take their country back.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentlewoman has expired.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield the gentlewoman from Florida an additional 1 minute.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Many Venezuelans have fled the chaos in their country to freedom and safety in my congressional district. The significant infusion of our Venezuelan friends and neighbors has affectionately dubbed my hometown of Weston, Florida, as Westonzuela.

We have welcomed them to our community, but we are committed to joining them in the fight for their country and for their friends and family members who remain there in the fight. This legislation is an important step in that battle, and I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting this important legislation.

Mr. ROYCE of California. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

In closing, I emphasize again that Venezuela is in crisis and we cannot wait any longer to take action. By passing the Venezuela Humanitarian Assistance and Defense of Democratic Governance Act, we can begin to provide the Venezuelan people with the resources they so desperately need.

But the United States, obviously, cannot do this alone. Sustained leadership is needed to address the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela from the U.N. Secretary General, members of the Security Council, and other international partners.

It is easy to talk about another country in the abstract, but these are human beings who are dying and sick. They are human beings just like us, and it behooves us to make sure that, while we condemn the brutality of the regime that has a stranglehold on that country, we feel only sympathy for the people. That is what this bill tries to address.

So I again urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

I want to again commend my partner from Florida, ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN,

who has done so much work with me through the years, and our chairman, ED ROYCE, whom it has been a real pleasure to work with.

This is another example of important bipartisan legislation that comes out of the Foreign Affairs Committee. I think that we set a dialogue and a blueprint for people coming together and working together. I think that is what the American people want to see.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1600

Mr. ROYCE of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues—Mr. ENGEL, the author, and Congresswoman ROS-LEHTINEN, the cosponsor of this measure—for their leadership and for bringing the bill here to the floor.

The world has watched with great sadness as President Maduro continues to run his country into the ground, denying his citizens access to basic food and denying them access to medicine. His obsession with consolidating power has resulted in Venezuela's economic collapse, and it is a collapse created by his wrongheaded populist and socialist mismanagement that has left his country in dire economic straits.

Even more disturbing to me is that Maduro's lieutenants continue lining their pockets while Venezuelan citizens go without food and medicine. This bill reiterates this body's support for the people of Venezuela by instructing relevant U.S. agencies to develop a strategy to address their immediate humanitarian needs, while supporting democracy and human rights.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. ROYCE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2658, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

EXPRESSING CONCERN AND CONDEMNATION OVER THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN VENEZUELA

Mr. ROYCE of California. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 259) expressing concern and condemnation over the political, economic, social, and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 259

Whereas in Venezuela, President Nicolas Maduro controls the Presidency, a majority of the municipalities, the Supreme Court, the military leadership, and the leadership of Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), and has gutted the National Assembly of the power it constitutionally holds;

Whereas in late October 2016, Venezuela's state courts and National Electoral Council, which are comprised of political allies of President Maduro, halted efforts to hold a referendum pursuant to provisions of the Venezuelan constitution to recall President Maduro, thereby denying the Venezuelan people the ability to pursue a democratic solution to Venezuela's crisis;

Whereas Venezuela's National Electoral Council postponed elections for governors and mayors scheduled for December 2016 and has not set a date to reschedule these elections;

Whereas there have been several attempts at dialogue between President Maduro and the opposition over the past year, which have all failed to yield tangible results;

Whereas the Government of Venezuela continues to silence its citizens through political arrests, with more than 444 political prisoners currently in jail;

Whereas Joshua Holt, a United States citizen, remains imprisoned in Venezuela with no due process, and four postponed hearings to date;

Whereas in its 2016 report, Venezuela's Violence Observatory assessed a widespread use of firearms by criminals and increased use of violence by police and military officials, contributing to a homicide rate of 91.8 per 100,000 residents, making Venezuela one of the most violent countries in the world;

Whereas police and military raids have led to widespread allegations of human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, mass arbitrary detentions, torture, forced evictions, and arbitrary deportations;

Whereas Venezuela is immersed in a deep economic crisis, with shortages of basic food supplies and medicines, and inflation estimated to top roughly 1,600 percent in 2017, according to the International Monetary Fund;

Whereas the Venezuelan military controls the production and distribution of basic food supplies, which has enabled corruption, fraud, and food trafficking, and exacerbated shortages throughout the country;

Whereas deteriorating conditions in health care persist, with the World Health Organization estimating that there are shortages of 75 percent of necessary medications and medical supplies, up from 55 percent in 2014 and 67 percent in 2015;

Whereas a recent survey—conducted jointly by the Central University of Venezuela, the Andrés Bello Catholic University and the Simón Bolívar University—found that almost 75 percent of Venezuelans lost an average of at least 19 pounds in 2016 as a result of a lack of proper nutrition amidst the country's economic crisis;

Whereas the country is facing increasing outbreaks of previously eradicated diseases, such as malaria and diphtheria;

Whereas the Health Ministry in Venezuela published an epidemiological bulletin in May 2017 (the first since 2015), showing a 30 percent increase in infant mortality, a 66 percent rise in maternal mortality, and a 76 percent increase in malaria cases;

Whereas the deteriorating conditions in Venezuela have prompted tens of thousands